

Strengthening Families Rhode Island

What is it? How does it prevent child abuse and neglect?

Strengthening Families Rhode Island (SFRI), based on national research and evidence, recognizes the unique role child care providers and other family support providers play in building protective factors in families with young children. This research has found that quality child care programs, not only tend to the developmental needs of children, but provide education and support to parents as well. By partnering with families and providing ongoing and timely support and education to parents, quality child care centers promote school success and strengthen family relationships, preventing abuse and neglect and other poor outcomes for children. SFRI has broadened the scope of this work to include other family support providers working directly with families in a variety of settings throughout Rhode Island.

Family involvement matters for young children's cognitive and social development. Substantial research supports family involvement, and a growing body of intervention evaluations demonstrates that family involvement can be strengthened with positive results for young children and their school readiness. Parenting is the family involvement process that includes the attitudes, values, and practices of parents raising young children. Nurturing, warm, and responsive parent-child relationships and parental participation in child-centered activities relate to positive learning outcomes in early childhood. Many services and interventions designed for families at risk of child abuse or neglect require families to be identified as potentially abusive or neglectful before they can access services, thus attaching stigma to them. In contrast, early childhood centers naturally develop supportive relationships with *all* families. These relationships protect children against abuse and neglect and bolster parents' efforts to nurture their kids in a natural, invisible, and positive way. As parents come to regard staff as trustworthy, helpful, and informative, they are more likely to turn to a staff member when they are under stress or at risk of abusing or neglecting their child. These supportive relationships are born of common interest in child-well being, nurtured by genuine concern on the part of the staff, and strengthened by staff members' responsiveness and ability to be helpful to parents when they need it.

The premise of the Strengthening Families Rhode Island program is that we train, support and guide child care providers and family support providers in their work with the parents of young children. We prepare the provider to be a strong competent mentor and coach for parents and other family members around issues of child development, parenting roles and responsibilities, and discipline. It is about parent engagement and family involvement - facilitating positive supportive relationships between parents and providers. The program is developed upon the Protective Factors Framework which is based upon a logic model that states that there are seven key program strategies that innately build five key protective factors that are known (researched) to reduce and prevent child abuse and neglect.

